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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HELSINKI 000186

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STATE FOR A/S JONES, DAS CONLEY, EUR/NB, EUR/EX, AND
EUR/PPD; NSC FOR AMB FRIED

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S LUNCH WITH PRESIDENT HALONEN

REF: A. HELSINKI 160

¶B. 04 HELSINKI 1603

¶C. A/S JONES-AMB MACK JANUARY 31 TELECON

Classified By: Ambassador Earle I. Mack for Reasons 1.4(B) and (D)

Summary and Recommendation

¶11. (C) In a meeting over lunch February 11, Finnish President Tarja Halonen reinforced in person what we have already heard from her staff: that she would appreciate an opportunity to meet with the President. Halonen told the Ambassador that she wants to take a leading role in promoting the normalized trans-Atlantic relationship described in the Secretary's Paris address, both now and when Finland holds the EU presidency (July-December 2006). Halonen feels that too often the basis for this relationship has been crisis management or follow-up coordination; in fact, the U.S. and Europe can and should work together to build a better world in all phases of life. She would like to discuss with the President how the United States and Finland together can advance this objective. Jukka Valtasaari, Finland's ambassador to the U.S., currently in Helsinki on a regular visit, reiterated this request and the rationale for it in a call on the Ambassador February 14. At the same time, he too referred subtly to the fact that Finland would have the EU presidency.

¶12. (C) In response to Halonen, the Ambassador welcomed her support for trans-Atlantic cooperation but said that, given the President's crowded calendar, it does not appear possible to schedule a meeting in the foreseeable future. Halonen asked that the United States keep her request in mind, and added that she has agreed with PM Matti Vanhanen that he will defer until 2006 his own request to meet with the President, so that Halonen's request can take primacy in 2005. (In his conversation with the Ambassador, Valtasaari underlined that Halonen's request takes precedence.) In the meantime, Halonen also asked whether it would be possible for her to have a moment of the President's time in Brussels just to introduce him to Vanhanen, whom he has never met.

¶13. (C) The Embassy recommends that the President acknowledge Halonen and Vanhanen on the margins of the February 22 meeting, so that Vanhanen -- who has not been shy about describing the importance of the United States to Europe's security, and who will be president of the Council of the European Union in 2006 -- can at least say that he has been introduced to the President. We also believe that a formal meeting with Halonen later in the year would reap benefits for the United States. It would be the first bilateral meeting between the two heads of state since April 2002. Halonen is a person of stature and credibility in Europe, and during her presidency there has been an understated but significant pattern of Finnish government support for the U.S. -- most prominently in Afghanistan and the Balkans but also in Iraq. The Finns see the trans-Atlantic relationship as one of the cornerstones of their foreign policy, and it will be one of the pillars of their EU presidency. These are not empty words -- during Finland's last presidency, in 1999, Turkey gained the status of candidate for EU membership. Acknowledging this desire for closeness will stand the U.S. in good stead over the next year in the many areas where we seek Finnish cooperation. End Summary and Recommendation.

Halonen Requests a Handshake for Vanhanen in Brussels,

and a Meeting for Herself Later in the Year

¶14. (C) On February 11, the Ambassador had lunch with President Halonen, at the latter's invitation. Presidential advisor Jarmo Viinanen, who will become her chef de cabinet later this year, also attended. The meeting covered a wide range of topics, but the one most on Halonen's mind was her desire to meet with President Bush, for reasons Halonen explained to the Ambassador. She said that she is still writing the remarks she will deliver in Brussels February 22, but that her theme will be the need for close trans-Atlantic cooperation, not just in times of crisis, but at all times. Halonen said that too often the United States and Europe have

based their relationship on crisis management, and the periods leading up to and away from crises. She said that Secretary Rice was "convincing" in the case the Secretary has

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made for transformational diplomacy, and the opportunity for nations to join forces in combating global problems. Whether those problems are related to human rights, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, or any of the other challenges of the 21st century, they call for trans-Atlantic cooperation in response. Halonen would like to play a leading role in fostering such cooperation, and would appreciate a chance to meet with the President to discuss what Halonen can do -- now and next year, when Finland holds the EU presidency -- to play such a role.

15. (C) The Ambassador confirmed that the President and Secretary have international cooperation very much in mind,

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and noted that the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative is another such area where nations can work together -- a long-term, multinational commitment to help meet the aspirations of the people of the BMENA region for democratic government. The Ambassador told President Halonen, however, that we do not expect any bilats to be held on the margins of the President's February 22 meeting in Brussels. Moreover, President Bush's calendar is very crowded right now, and we do not believe it will be possible to schedule a meeting for the foreseeable future. Halonen accepted this but reiterated that her request stands. She is also aware that PM Matti Vanhanen had requested a meeting with the President. In fact, Halonen and Vanhanen had spoken about this earlier in the day, and had agreed that if President Bush's schedule is full, Vanhanen will put off his request until 2006, in favor of Halonen's request for a meeting sometime in 2005.

16. (C) Halonen concluded that she looks forward to seeing the President in Brussels on the 22nd, and would like to take a moment of the President's time to introduce him formally to PM Vanhanen. She made clear that she was not speaking of a bilat or pull-aside, but a few moments to enable Vanhanen to at least say that he and President Bush have met. In a February 14 conversation with the Ambassador, Finnish Ambassador to the U.S. Valtasaari reiterated to us President Halonen's interest in both a brief handshake in Brussels and a later meeting, briefly noting the upcoming Finnish EU presidency.

Iraq

17. (C) The Ambassador thanked President Halonen for the assistance Finland has shown already for reconstruction in Iraq, through support for the UN protection force, provision of police instructors to the academy in Jordan, fielding forensic scientists to survey mass graves, and humanitarian aid. Now that the people of Iraq have shown the courage and commitment to exercise their right to vote, he said, it is essential that the international community step up its efforts, in order to assist the new government in developing the political institutions necessary to make democracy work. For example, the Ambassador noted, Finland could join in the NATO Training Mission in Iraq or other support and/or multilateral funding. He pointed out that in the long run, if a nation cannot take responsibility for its own security, it cannot hope to preserve democracy. The Finns could also contribute to strengthening newly-formed Iraqi political institutions, and/or provide support for the political process that will lead to a new constitution and future elections.

18. (C) Halonen said she was happy to see how well the January 30 voting had gone. It would be difficult to gain Finnish public support for stationing troops and/or civilian experts within Iraq itself, she said, but she would like to work out a "complementary system" that would enable Finland to do its share in contributing more to Iraqi reconstruction. Doing so would not only help the people of Iraq, but help the U.S. and EU "rebuild confidence in each other." She and the Ambassador agreed that the DCM would consult with Viinanen in more detail about steps Finland could take. The Ambassador commented that disagreements over Operation Iraqi Freedom are history, "and history is in the past, the further in the past the better." Halonen seconded the thought.

Afghanistan

19. (C) The Ambassador, noting Finland's long-term commitment to reconstruction in Afghanistan (Ref A), asked whether the Finns could increase their support -- by, for example, contributing to a second Provincial Reconstruction Team. Halonen said this is worth considering, but made no commitments.

Middle East

¶10. (C) President Halonen said that assisting the Israeli/Palestinian search for peace is a very high priority for the EU, and that Finland strongly supports the common U.S./EU effort. The Ambassador reviewed recent steps taken by the United States, including the appointment of Lieutenant General Ward as security coordinator, and asked Finland to consider what role the Finns could play on a national basis. Halonen agreed to review this, but also urged that the U.S. keep the EU thoroughly engaged.

EU China Arms Embargo

¶11. (C) The Ambassador acknowledged that the GoF considers the EU's Code of Conduct a more useful instrument in controlling the types of technology transfers the Chinese are most apt to want (Ref A). But not all governments are as conscientious as Finland's. Lifting the embargo now would send the wrong signal at the wrong time and could cause serious trans-Atlantic repercussions. Halonen said she has not been active in this discussion, and Finland's policy will be consistent with EU decisions, but it seemed to her that China's record on human rights is not as bad as that of some other nations. The Ambassador, aware of Halonen's reputation as a human rights activist, said, "In your heart, you know lifting the embargo is the wrong thing to do." Halonen did take this thought on board, smiled and nodded, but also advised that U.S. efforts concentrate on France, which she felt was out in front of all other EU nations in advocating the lifting of the embargo.

Finland, the EU, and NATO

¶12. (C) Halonen has questioned publicly the wisdom of the GoF's plan to expand Finland's peacekeeping law to allow troops to be deployed on the basis of an EU mandate. (At present only a UN or an OSCE mandate will suffice.) In her conversation with the Ambassador she did not refer to the mandate issue, but did assure us that EU defense cooperation will not compete with or undercut NATO. The EU's rapid reaction force will be for crisis management only, she said, whereas broader questions of defense and security properly belong to the North Atlantic Alliance. The Ambassador said the U.S. appreciates that assurance, and also appreciates Finnish and Swedish leadership within the Partnership for Peace.

Russia

¶13. (C) Ref B reports on President Halonen's December meeting with President Putin. She told the Ambassador that Putin is a "northern man" -- referring to his St. Petersburg background -- who hand-picked the governor. This gives the Finns greater access and increases Finland's chances of playing a leading role in developing EU/Russian relations. She acknowledged that Putin has shortcomings, and expressed misgivings about his apparent attempts to centralize power. Nevertheless, she said, he clearly feels that Russia is a part of Europe, and therefore it is in the EU's interest to get along with him. Finland hopes that by 2010 Russia will once again be the largest importer of Finnish products. The Finns also would like to increase their investment in Russia, but need more reassurance of economic and political stability than they have at present.

¶14. (C) The Ambassador noted press reports that in January Russian Trade Minister German Gref had telephoned Paula Lehtomaki, his Finnish opposite number, to ask the GoF to restrain Finnish press reporting on allegations that the Russian trade mission in Helsinki had loaned some of the apartments it owns to a prostitution ring. Halonen laughed, and opined that opening a window to the West is the best way to let democracy seep into Russia. (Note: MFA Under Secretary for Political Affairs Lyra confirmed to us recently

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that the Gref-Lehtomaki conversation did take place. He said that distribution of the memcon had been very limited, "but obviously someone couldn't resist" leaking the juicy story.)
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